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FEMALE CRIMINALS.

BY MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS, HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTOR OF PRISONS.

Two Italian savants, Lombroso and Ferrero, both well known as earnest students of the new science of criminal anthropology, have recently directed their researches into the peculiarities of offenders of the weaker sex. Criminal woman has been brought under the mental microscope, her traits and idiosyncracies minutely and patiently examined. The process is much the same as that adopted in the investigation of the criminal man ; the result also is similar. We have now put before us a particular type, a distinct and peculiar character, whose separate existence is supposed to be proved, based upon certain well established physical and physiological differences between her and the normal woman. It may be questioned, perhaps, whether we gain much by what has been elicited ; whether the facts now published are not more curious than instructive. What useful purpose is served by this photographic portraiture of the female criminal is not exactly apparent, except perhaps that by recognizing criminal traits we are put upon our guard against those who exhibit them. Yet this might prove very inconvenient, sometimes ; we might be led to quarrel with or misjudge our best friends. For we here touch upon the really weak spot, the one great flaw in the doctrines of the criminal anthropologist. It has no doubt been proved satisfactorily that evil-doers possess many purely personal qualities and characteristics ; the awkward thing is that these same peculiarities are encountered also among the most exemplary members of society. To this the Lombroso school answers that these last have never been sufficiently tempted ; that some day, given adequate inducement, they too, will certainly go astray. All that is left us, presumably, is to hope for the best ; to con-

tinue to associate with those whose looks should hang them, trusting that their innate wickedness may never drive them to suddenly shock and surprise us by their misdeeds. But we may take heart of grace, for the whole position is otherwise assailable; this theory of the inherent instinctive impulse to crime in certain individuals, cursed with unsought but ineradicable imperfections, can be contested on other grounds. It is a well-known fact that evil-doers pass from the lesser to greater crimes; the old saying, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, is an everlasting truth. The criminal anthropologists have never yet explained how it is that the thief's nose, which is found to be a "turn up," does not become the "crooked" in the murderer, when the thief expands, as he so often does, into the more heinous criminal.

While dissenting, however, from his general conclusions, we may follow the scientist with interest through his experiments. He has discovered and classified many strange phenomena, the result of his examination of a not very large number of female offenders.

Lombroso finds that the typical female criminal has coarse black hair and a good deal of it; but this is obviously only true of Italians, there is no such general color among northern or Saxon races. She has often a long face, a receding forehead, over-jutting brows, prominent cheek-bones, an exaggerated frontal angle as seen in monkeys and savage races, and nearly always square massive jaws and a firm mouth. Lombroso insists strongly upon the last-named trait, as very generally present; the female offender is especially remarkable for her want of feminality. She is virile, masculine in voice and in figure, lank and meagre without the rounded forms, a chief beauty in the true woman, and able therefore, as in many well-known cases, to wear male attire without detection. The eyes of the female offender are said to be sunken, deep set, in color dark (only in the Italians, of course); wrinkles soon show, and in elderly women are strongly developed in certain parts of the face; the cranial capacity is inferior to that of the normal woman; there is a greater tendency to grow gray and to baldness; moles are common; hairiness, which is unusual and unfeminine, has been frequently found; strabismus also, and generally an unprepossessing appearance. Yet the offender in early years often possesses *la beauté de la jeunesse*; degeneracy does not show till the adipose

tissue has shrunk, then the salient cheek bones protrude, the lower jaw hardens, the complexion fades and wrinkles deepen. Although in subjects whose attractiveness is part of their stock in trade, beauty lingers through close attention to artificial allurements, the female offender grows more and more ugly with advancing years, till at last she becomes a hideous and repulsive old hag, with all her native blemishes and imperfections thrown up into strong relief.

Passing on to the mental or psychological characteristics, these also are strongly marked according to the Italian enquirers. It may be stated here, parenthetically, that the facts deduced in this respect rest on a broader basis. For the physical traits, but just enumerated, follow upon somewhat limited investigations; not as many as a hundred women in all having been examined. But as regards the mental qualities the professors have sought their illustrations far and wide, in all countries and all ages, and adduce some rather remote female criminals, such as the mother of Antaxerxes Messalina, Ta-ki of China, or such hackneyed cases as those of Brinvilliers, Tiquet, Lafarge, Jegado, and Gabrielle Bompard, in support of their generalizations. For some strange reason, from ignorance perhaps, or possibly unfamiliarity with the English language, hardly any of the notorious female offenders in England are brought forward in evidence, although many would afford startling corroboration of the conclusions drawn. I propose, therefore, to refer to some of these in reviewing the psychological aspect of the female offender.

The vices most prominent in the feminine criminal are found to be great cruelty, a passionate temper rising quickly into extravagant fury, an excessive craving for revenge, low cunning strongly developed, greed, shameless rapacity, an inordinate love of lucre, mendacity to the utter contempt of all truthfulness. Such women are erotic, but not capable of pure, devoted love; they are weak in that maternal feeling which is usually the strongest sentiment in the feminine nature; they are given to dissipation, audacious, violent, imperious, dominating weaker characters whether of their own or of the opposite sex, their vices, in a word, are of the male rather than the female. In planning crimes they exhibit much deliberation, can bide their time with fiendish patience, following out their purpose with unshakeable, undeviating persistence, and when the moment of

action arrives will strike without cowardly hesitation or any fear of future remorse. They are especially clever in instigating others to the commission of crime, using them as catspaws or agents, evading direct responsibility themselves, and being strenuously persistent in denial, in obstinate refusal to confess. All these traits have been proved over and over again to exist in the worst types of female criminals, but happily their combination in one individual is extremely rare. When found in full development they constitute a type of extraordinary wickedness which the world does not often see. These are the class of "born" criminals, the very worst specimen of female offenders, the women of whom writers speak as "more cynical, more depraved, more terrible than any form of criminal male." "The woman is seldom wicked," says the Italian proverb, "but when she is, she surpasses the man."

This, the worst type of female, the "born" criminal is not common in the softer sex. So much so that the scientists readily admit that the "occasional" criminals form the large majority of female criminals. The two classes indeed overlap constantly, and it seems hardly necessary to distinguish between them when discussing feminine criminology. Every woman who has once fallen, not only into crime, but from the strict paths of virtue, is probably capable of further, even the deepest, forms of degradation. Speaking broadly, she is either good or bad; when she is the first but has broken through the safeguards of moral restraint and lapsed into the second she may then drift on and downward into any kind of crime. This is generally accepted as an axiom by all who have had much experience with female offenders. The only distinction is one of degree; the worst only are wholly bad, exhibiting none or but few of the "contradictions," as Lombroso calls them, the redeeming qualities which so often raise them from the lowest levels.

Whatever, then, the class of offender, whether, adopting the Lombroso division, we speak of the "born" or the "occasional" criminal, in all alike the same traits are to be found only in a greater or lesser degree. The Italian theories of facial and physical characteristics may not be entirely convincing, being deduced as has been said from too narrow data and dealing with too few nationalities to be accepted as establishing any universal law. But I have found in criminal women, both in my reading and within

my own personal experience, which is not of yesterday, not only the mental traits and tendencies already enumerated, but others not mentioned by Lombroso. Many cases might be adduced in corroboration of the alleged cold-blooded, callous cruelty of the female murderess, the savage determination with which she carries out her fell purpose ; no difficulties deter her, she can wait and watch for opportunity concealing her devilish intention under a smiling face, till at last she administers poison and strikes the blow with a nice calculation of effect. She seldom shrinks, seldom falters after the deed is done, either in facing consequences or removing traces. Catherine Hayes having caused her husband's death wished to cut off his head with a penknife and boil it ; Mrs. Manning dug the grave for her victim, three weeks ahead, just in front of her kitchen fire, where she roasted and ate a goose the very afternoon of the crime. Kate Webster dismembered the corpse of her mistress and boiled it piecemeal ; Hannah Dobbs strangled a lodger and dragged her body downstairs to bury it among ashes in a disused cellar. Dixblanc, the French cook who murdered Madame Riel in Park Lane, did much the same. Female cruelty of a still more revolting kind was displayed by Mrs. Brownrigg and the two Meteyards ; the first of whom flogged her parish apprentices to death, having first starved and shamefully ill-used them ; the latter were milliners who tortured their employees under the most disgusting circumstances, killing them with refined cruelty and afterwards chopping their bodies to pieces. Within quite recent years the Irish woman, Mrs. Montagu, rivalled these monsters by her fiendish cruelty to her own children, and in the Staunton case, although the men were the principal agents, the two women were included in the crime of taking an innocent life by cruel torture, " a deed," said the Judge, " so black and hideous as to be unparalleled in all the records of crime." Professor Lombroso makes no mention of any of these cases, which are certainly not less illustrative of cruelty than any in his book.

Among the mixed motives that compel women to great crimes greed stands high, then comes the desire for vengeance, the gratification of passionate hatred for real or fancied wrongs, the ungovernable outbreaks of fierce temper, the mad promptings of jealousy, for the female offender is an ardent lover, strong in love as in hate, and implacable when crossed or flouted. Sarah Malcolm, the charwoman, committed a triple

murder, incited thereto by the sight of her mistress's wealth in coin and silver plate; the murder of O'Connor by the Mannings originated in the woman's cupidity, her thirst for her victim's possessions; it was the same with Kate Webster, Jessie McLachlan, and Hannah Dobbs. There have been numerous cases of child murder in England by mothers to secure insurance money, the policies often taken out on purpose by the inhuman parent, who has already doomed her offspring to death. Baby farmers have been driven by greed to practise atrocious cruelties on the infants committed to their tender mercies; cases innumerable might be quoted of the employment of poison (of which more directly) to gratify inordinate rapacity. Feminine rage, often the forerunner of mania, is most noticeable perhaps within prison walls, and it is sometimes so spontaneous, so persistent and terrible, as to be only explained by actual mental derangement. The woman McCarthy, who, in Millbank, stabbed a matron without a moment's warning, was, no doubt, a homicidal lunatic, but Flossie Fitzherbert was sane enough, and when she assaulted another matron and broke a medicine bottle into her skull she was carried away by momentary but quite uncontrollable ferocity. It was in a fit of passion of this kind that Dixblanc, chafing against what seemed unjust rebuke, turned on her mistress and struck her dead. For long-continued, indomitable ill-temper, the woman Julia Newman, who made Millbank hideous for nearly a year, will never be quite forgotten. Fierce feuds between the prisoners themselves continued from previous quarrels when free, or originating in new discords in durance, are of constant occurrence, leading at times to sanguinary conflicts, which but for prompt interference might have ended in loss of life. I have before my mind's eye the case of a woman whose loathing for a comrade was so intense that she could not be trusted within sight of her, and who made several attempts, happily abortive, to murderously assault her enemy.

Jealousy, as might be expected in the female subject, has impelled many to crime. It is now well known that Constance Kent, whose offence was only tardily proved on her own confession, did her infant brother to death because she was jealous of him, although on no very reasonable grounds. When sexual relations intervene the feeling is naturally intensified; many violent acts might be instanced in which outraged women have

sought to vent their disappointment on truant or unfaithful swains. When the woman of greatly perverted moral sense has been crossed in love, her thirst for vengeance has only been assuaged by the most terrible reprisals. One of the most hideous cases on record is perhaps that of Mary Blandy, who poisoned her father because he would not consent to her marriage with Captain Cranstown, whom he knew to be a miscreant and unprincipled fortune hunter.

Poisoning is a crime peculiarly attractive to the female offender, as is proved by the hundreds of cases in which it has been perpetrated by them in times past and present. As I have written elsewhere, "its chief recommendation to them is its simplicity and the many facilities that are offered for its commission to a sex so generally employed as mistress, housewife, nurse or cook." It is a strange fact and a further illustration of this contention that according to the last statistics of crime in the United States as furnished by the Census Bulletin of 1892, as many as 244, out of a general total of 393 female homicides were committed by women in "personal service," or, speaking more in detail, by 26 housewives, 50 housekeepers, 138 servants, 16 washerwomen and 10 nurses. No information is available of the method employed, but it may be safely inferred that poison was largely used. This would only be in harmony with all criminal experience. The crime which commended itself to Lucretia Borgia and Brinvilliers is still deplorably prevalent and we have our Maybricks, Cheshams, Catherine Wilsons, Christina Edmunds and Madeline Smiths in modern days. These and other cases to which Lombroso makes no reference are not likely to be soon forgotten; as that of Rebecca Smith who confessed on the scaffold, when about to suffer for poisoning her baby one month old, that she had already poisoned seven other children; of Chesham who, imitating the harridans who invented and sold Aqua Tofana, confessed that she had for years carried on a large business in removing husbands, both her own and others. Catherine Wilson was a wholesale poisoner whose foul practices were in all cases inspired by greed and who first used, if she did not actually discover, the properties of colchicum, the pretty violet flower of the meadow-saffron so familiar in Swiss summer fields, in the form of a slow and not easily detected poison. Fanny Oliver used prussic acid to get rid of a husband who was insured in a burial society; and

Madame Lafarge, whose case, being enveloped in much mawkish sentimentality, attracted world-wide attention at the time, did her husband to death with arsenic, the true "bungler's" or "beginner's" weapon, as its symptoms and the traces it leaves are so easily detected.

The typical female poisoner, however, was Anna Zwanziger or Anna Schönleben, known as the German Brinvilliers, whose crimes were committed about the commencement of the present century. It is somewhat strange that this woman has also escaped the attention of Lombroso, for she exemplifies some of the most remarkable criminal traits, and her picture as handed down to us is so much direct evidence upon the outward aspect of her species. Zwanziger was of small stature, thin, deformed, her sallow meagre face deeply furrowed by passion as well as by age. Her eyes expressed envy and malice; her brow was perpetually clouded; her manner cringing, servile and affected; age and ugliness had not diminished her craving for admiration. Mock sensibility, and weak moral sense and an undoubted taste for dissipation led her into evil courses at an early age, and left her at fifty reduced to the greatest poverty, homeless, friendless, and at her wit's end to live. It was then that she adopted poisoning as a means of livelihood, as a profession, and her own exultant account of the power it conferred on her may be commended to those who are interested in the psychological analysis of the female criminal mind.

Her attachment to poison was based upon the proud consciousness that it gave her the power to break through every restraint, to attain every object, to gratify every inclination; she could deal out death or sickness as she pleased, torture all who offended her or stood in her way; she could revenge herself through it for every slight; it amused her to see the contortions of her victims; she could get fellow-servants and others into trouble, throw suspicion upon any innocent persons whom she disliked. If she wished to bring a married man to her feet, she might murder his wife when she chose; if she hankered after the possessions of others, she might acquire them when the poison had done its work. As time went on she became an expert toxicologist; mixing and giving poison was her constant occupation. She was so devotedly attached to this deadly familiar friend that she carried it always about with her, and when arrested and some arsenic was found in her pocket, "she seemed to tremble with

pleasure and gazed upon the white powder with eyes beaming with rapture." When sentenced to capital punishment she told the judge that her death was fortunate for mankind, as it would have been impossible for her to discontinue her trade of poisoning. There can be no question that Zwanziger fully fills up the type of "born" criminal; she was in truth a veritable monster, an incarnate female fiend.

It is agreeable to turn from these sombre details, from the black traits that show criminal women at their worst, and which, as has been said, are rare in their fullest development, to the smaller foibles, the blemishes, the blameworthy but not deeply criminal failings of their everyday life, mainly as seen when under restraint. Some of these the female offender shares with her more virtuous and immaculate sister, but shows in an aggravated and exaggerated form; the vanity, for instance, which is strong even in the inmates of a prison; the intolerance of control and of constituted authority, for what in the best is mere obstinacy or self assertion becomes in the worst direct defiance; the persistent misconduct, the fluent, shrewish tongue that will not be silenced; perversity in fact so marked as to be nearly unmanageable and incurable, especially when associated with a readiness to graver offence, or a morbid tendency to surrender and despair. On the other hand female prisoners have some pleasing traits; gratitude is very common among them, they are always sensible to kindness and sympathy, and can in truth be more easily governed through the gentler influences than by stern, unyielding discipline. A very curious trait taken in connection with the maintenance of good order in a female prison is the strong inclination of the inmates towards combined disorder. There is a contagion of misconduct, if I may so call it, which spreads with strange rapidity through a prison; it may be the peculiar imitateness of the feminine character, the ready yielding to example even in ill doing, but whatever the cause the effect is frequently observed by others as well as myself. When one woman "breaks out," many more, if within reach of her influence whether by sight or sound, will follow suit. This is why "breaking out," a favorite but not always intelligible sin against good order and which shows itself in wholesale destruction of property and personal effects, cell furniture, window panes, woodwork, bedding, clothes, seldom occurs in isolated instances; why, many years ago, the sudden

fancy to drum upon the inside of a cell with the soles of her feet which took one prisoner, soon extended to a whole ward; why if a few are insubordinate, the whole female prison is transformed speedily into a bear garden.

Vanity in a female prisoner would be merely laughable if it were not so sad to behold. It is, however, the one touch of nature which proves the human kinship, and there is perhaps some hope for even these poor degraded creatures if they are thus swayed by such harmless emotions. Prison matrons would be perpetually busy if they checked every attempt made by their charges to adopt the last fashionable coiffure; "fringes" are "going out" perhaps in general society, but they are still amazingly popular in prison. Criminals will trim their hair as it pleases them, and the wisest disciplinarian affects to see nothing of the fringe. In the same way, once, when chignons were in vogue, the female felt happy whose locks escaped the prison scissors and were long enough to fold over a pad of oakum. The ingenuity, again, with which some prisoners will twist and turn their unbecoming uniform into some faint notion of the fashions of the day might have earned these artists good wages in a dress-maker's *atelier*; I have seen panniers counterfeited and polonaises, skirts draped or tied back, dress improvers manufactured out of whalebones or horsehair; no doubt, when the present "bell" skirt is fading out of fashion it will be largely patronized in jail. The craze for personal adornment leads women to skim the grease off their scanty allowance of soup, with which they plaster their hair. I once knew an aged prisoner who was caught scraping the dust from the red brick cell wall to serve her as rouge.

Some more estimable qualities may be noticed. I must contest Lombroso's theory that maternal affection is generally wanting among female offenders; it is directly contradicted by my experience. I have found "the children's ward" quite a model nursery, and prisoner mothers exemplary in their care and attention. It may be that when at large, relieved from the controlling eye of authority, the criminal is less affectionate, but I much question whether she is any worse than others of her class. Another good point in the female (as well as in the male) in durance, is her unwearied patience and devotion in nursing the sick. Of course it may be urged, *per contra*, that here again she is under super-

vision, that hospital work forms an agreeable change to the monotony of prison routine; still with all due deductions the fact remains that the prisoner nurse is deft-fingered, soft-footed, watchful and kindly in her ministrations. The sympathy for the sick is extended even to the officers over them, and I am forcibly reminded of the case of a matron whose slow death of malignant disease was touchingly respected by the universal and spontaneous resolve of all the prisoners to "give no trouble" during her last illness. It was usually a very unruly prison, too.

Of the gratitude which lies low in the offender's heart, but which can be reached by judicious treatment, I shall quote but one instance. It is that given in Scougal's *Scenes from a Silent World*, an admirable monograph on prison life. A hardened offender, one with sixty-four convictions against her—Lombroso would have classed her as a "born" criminal—arrived scowling and sullen under a fresh sentence. Her conduct corresponded with her sullen demeanor and was continuously defiant and refractory, until an unofficial visitor took her in hand. Then "she became a totally changed being—gentle, obedient, and deeply grateful to those whom she found to her utter amazement to be really anxious to help and comfort her." It was there she had first met with pity or kindness from her fellow-creatures, and the first touch of human sympathy melted her despair as sunshine softens ice.

Among the many dicta of the criminal anthropologists is the assertion that primitive woman was not given to wrong-doing, and that the female offender is a product of civilization, increasing with it. This theory may be supported, perhaps, by wider and more general investigations made, but it is certainly not proved by English experience. Nothing is more remarkable in the annals of crime than its steady diminution among females in England in recent years. In the last decade there has been a decrease of 41 per cent. in the total numbers imprisoned, comparing 1892-3 with 1882-3. Although the prison population cannot be taken as a final test of the conditions of crime, the fact cannot be overlooked when the decrease is so strongly marked. Moreover, during these ten years there has been a general increase of the population of 25 per cent. If the statistics are sifted and the figures taken according to the gravity of misdeeds and sentences, the decrease is still more surprising. The average total of convicts, the females, that is to say who have

been sentenced to penal servitude for terms of three years and upwards, was in 1892-3 just 245, as against 887 in 1882-3, a diminution of 72 per cent.; in the "local" prisons, those for lesser terms and offences, the decrease has been 33 per cent., but the two combined give the figure already quoted of 41 per cent. Another highly satisfactory feature is found by examining the figures further and comparing the ages of criminals in custody. This clearly shows that the principal decrease has occurred among the younger criminals, in other words, that the supply is being cut off at the source, that fewer recruits are enlisted or drawn into the great army of crime. But the older habitual criminals continue to flock in; nothing seemingly will eradicate the poison when it has once been taken into the system; the woman who has fallen into evil ways seldom recovers her position. Now in 1892-3 the largest proportion of female prisoners in custody is still represented by those who have been most often convicted; in 1882-3 this total was 9,316, in 1892-3 it was 9,408. Sharply contrasted with these figures the first convictions, or those who have been convicted but once, show up in the manner already described. While these in 1882-3 were 7,008, now in 1892-3 there were only 4,377.

A further but somewhat remote diminution may be expected when the old hands gradually disappear. But this process of depletion will be slow; for, strange to say, the criminal woman seems to thrive in prison. Her longevity, not in the general population alone, but among the so-called dangerous classes especially, is established beyond all doubt. "It is a well-known fact," says Lombroso, "that the number of aged female criminals surpasses the male contingent." This he explains on the theory that women have greater powers of resistance to misfortune. "This is a well-known law which in the case of the female criminal seems almost exaggerated, so remarkable is her longevity and the toughness with which she endures the hardships, even the prolonged hardships of prison life. . . . I know some denizens of female prisons who have reached the age of 90, having lived within those walls since they were 29 without any grave injury to health." It is pretty obvious from this that criminal women stand punishment better than men.

ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.